

Serious Advice to Students and Young
Ministers. 4

A

S E R M O N,

Preached at *Broad-mead*, BRISTOL,

BEFORE THE

EDUCATION-SOCIETY,

AUGUST 17, 1774,

And published at their Request.

By JOHN TOMMAS.

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1 TIM. iv. 12.

Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

THE nature and design of the institution which is the occasion of our meeting at this time, have been so fully explained, and the propriety and usefulness of it so amply defended against the objections that have been, or can be made to it, in what was published at its commencement; as also by what was delivered at our last annual meeting, and by desire since printed, that I think it altogether needless for me to enlarge upon this subject. They, who have still their objections to this institution, will, I hope, have them removed by the increasing smiles of divine providence attending it, and by the abilities, exemplary deportment, and usefulness of those, who have been, or yet may be, encouraged by it in their views to the work of the ministry.

To assist the improvement, direct the conduct, and, as far as possible, promote the usefulness of those, who

have voluntarily devoted themselves to God, and his people, in the work of the ministry, it is well known is the design of this institution. And towards this valuable and important end, I would therefore cheerfully throw in my mite at this time, by laying before you a few things from the words first read.

It seems at the time when *Paul* wrote this epistle, he was in expectation of having an interview with *Timothy*; but in order that he might be at no loss how he should behave himself in the house of God for the present, he writes to him this epistle, lays before him the greatness of the charge he had received, and represents the difficulties attending the faithful execution of it; and then proceeds to inform him, that it should be his care to put the brethren in remembrance of what he had taught him, patiently enduring all the afflictions he might be exposed to, behaving himself with the utmost decorum, and carefully improving the gifts which God had honored him with, for the good of the church, and the salvation of immortal souls. Under this article of advice are the words which I propose to consider, *Let no man despise thy youth*—As if the apostle had said, (supposing him to refer to what had just dropt from his pen, *These things command and teach!*) Though you are but a young man, yet suffer no man to despise you; but use your authority and magnify your office. Or rather his design may be to warn *Timothy*, exhorting him to keep at the remotest distance from every thing in his sentiments, temper and conduct,

that

that might be a temptation to any man to think lightly of him, because he was young. And in order to this he exhorts him to be an example to the believers; which, as if the apostle had said, is the way to preserve thee from contempt, to support thy reputation, and promote thy usefulness. In treating upon the subject before us, I shall attempt to shew,

I. That there are many things which have in their nature a tendency to expose young ministers to contempt, and which, therefore, should be carefully avoided by them.

II. That the things specified and exhorted to by the apostle, are calculated to preserve their reputation, and promote their usefulness.

III. I shall advance some arguments, in order to inforce upon young ministers, and those who have views to the work of the ministry, a due regard to the apostle's advice. Which may serve as an application of the whole. And

I. I shall attempt to shew, that there are many things which have in their nature a tendency to expose young ministers to contempt, and which should therefore be carefully avoided by them.

Let no man despise thy youth. Perhaps it may not be amiss to observe, that there are some things which, where

wherever they are found, whether with professors in general, or with ministers, young or old, will not fail to expose them to contempt. Among which we may reckon an habitual and manifest backwardness to wait upon God in his worship and ordinances—carelessness and irreverence when they attend—sinful diversions and amusements—a fantastical conformity to the fashions of the world in their apparel—idleness and inattention to the work and duty of the station wherein the providence of God has placed them—intemperance, deceit, covetousness.—These things, wherever they are found in a prevailing degree, whether in private christians or ministers, young or old, will not fail to expose them to censure, and persons will be under a temptation to despise such, let their pretensions to christianity be what they may.

But, besides these, there are several other things which a young minister, and those who have views to the ministry, should carefully avoid, in order to preserve themselves from being despised. And

1st. If a young minister, or those who have their views to the ministry, would not be despised, let them guard against levity in their disposition and conversation. There is a wide difference between *levity* and *cheerfulness*. The one has a tendency to render a person agreeable in himself, his company desirable and his conversation instructive and useful—while the other will not fail to expose him to contempt, be hurtful to his own soul, dangerous and moreover very often injurious to others.—“Let others, says the excellent Dr.

“*Watts* (in his humble attempt) obtain the honor of being

“ ing good jesters, of having it in their power to spread
 “ a laugh round the company when they please ; but
 “ let it be your ambition to act on the stage of life as
 “ men who are devoted to the service of the God of
 “ heaven, to the real benefit of mankind on earth, and
 “ to their eternal interests.”—The young minister, and
 those who have views to the sacred work, should call
 to mind, that the station they do or may fill up in the
 church of God, requires them to keep at the remotest
 distance from levity and froth in their temper and
 conversation, if ever they expect to support the dignity
 of their character and preserve themselves from being
 despised. And

2dly. If a young minister, or those who have views
 to the work of the ministry; would not be despised, let
 them avoid pride and affectation.

It is not so much pride in dress, or a haughty stiff-
 ness in their behaviour I intend ; though these, where
 they prevail, will ever render men ridiculous, and pro-
 voke others to despise them ; and should therefore be
 avoided with care.—But what I have principally in
 view, is pride and affectation on account of gifts and
 talents, which they suppose themselves possess of, whe-
 ther natural or acquired.—If God has blessed them
 with a quickness of apprehension to take in, with
 strength of memory to retain, with freedom and volu-
 bility of speech to communicate with propriety to
 others what may instruct and entertain them ; and if
 to these are added an acquaintance with languages,
 arts and sciences, yet may it in general be supposed,
 that their attainments in this respect are not arrived
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to maturity, or any great degree of perfection. And, therefore, if they would not be despised, let them carefully lay aside and avoid all affectation, parade, conceit, self-sufficiency, and importance, on account of these things: for wherever such a disposition discovers itself, it will not fail to create disgust: it has, perhaps, as much as any thing had a tendency to beget, and confirm the prejudices of some serious and good men against what is called a liberal education, with a view to the work of the ministry; when they have seen those, who, it is well known, have not excelled in their learned attainments, behave with conceit and affectation, as if they had been possessed of all the ample stores of learning and science.—Besides, it is well known, that those who have shared the largest measures of sanctified learning, have shone forth as examples of modesty, humility and self-diffidence. If therefore young ministers, or those who have views to the sacred work, would not be despised, let them carefully guard against pride and affectation, on account of their abilities and attainments, whether natural or acquired. And,

3dly. If young ministers, and those who have views to the work of the ministry, would not be despised, let them guard against a worldly spirit and temper, that no man may be under a temptation to say, or think, that they would neither have undertook nor pursued this work of the ministry, if it had not been for the prospect and expectation of the worldly advantages arising from it.—Whoever enters upon the work of the ministry with these views, whether preceded by a course

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of education, or without it (for I see no reason why the latter may not as well as the former) having no love to God, no proper concern for the souls of men, regardless of what becomes of the flock, if they can but live in ease and affluence, need not wonder if they are despised. The way to avoid this is to shew, as much as possible, that they are influenced by a supreme love to God, that they thus devoted themselves to the service of their Redeemer and his people in consequence of divine impressions upon their own hearts, and the manifest leadings of divine providence, pointing out this to be the path of duty. And as to worldly matters, that they are perfectly easy, and satisfied with the appointment of Jesus on this head, who hath "ORDAINED that they who preach the gospel, should "live of the gospel." According to which, the original commission which still remains in force runs thus, *Luke* x. 3—10. "Go preach, saying the kingdom of "heaven is at hand; provide neither gold, nor silver, "nor brass in your purses; for the workman is worthy of his meat and the labourer of his hire." Those to whom Christ sends his servants, are by his express order to maintain them. But, in a dependance on this provision, his servants should be careful that no man have occasion to despise them by having it in his power to say, that they would not have engaged in this work, had it not been for the worldly gains and advantages which they hoped to reap from it.

Many more things might have been taken notice of, such as, forming hasty and imprudent connections, irregular conduct in the family, idleness, and other

things of a like nature, which have often exposed young students and ministers to contempt.

But I forbear, and go on to the second thing proposed, which is to shew,

II. That the things specified and exhorted to by the apostle, are calculated to secure their reputation and promote their usefulness. Be thou an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. I shall consider them in the order in which they lie in the text. And

1st. If they would not be despised, let them be an example to the believers in word. This may perhaps refer to the word of doctrine; as we read in *Titus* ii. 7, 8. In doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned, that he which is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you. Such should be careful to shew, that though they are young in years, yet are they not children in understanding, not fickle and inconstant in their opinions and sentiments, not driven about and tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, nor carried about with divers and strange doctrines: but that their hearts are established with grace, and that they have sufficient reason to continue in the things which they have learned, giving full proof, that from the early part of life, they have known the holy scriptures which are able to make us wise unto salvation, 2 *Tim.* iii. 15. Such steadfastness is requisite in order to their being an example to the believers, and to preserve them from being despised,

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Be an example to the believers in word. He that would be so, must be careful as to his common speech and conversation, that it be always with grace seasoned with salt, that he may be able to speak to every man to his profit and edification.—No corrupt communication should proceed out of his mouth at any time : but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may administer grace to the hearers. He should take care that his common discourse be wise and instructive ; and when it is most free and chearful, that it be not frothy and vain, idle and impertinent.

Such care in common speech and conversation is agreeable to the advice of the apostle, will be a means of supporting the dignity of the ministerial character, and promoting the great ends of it.

2dly. Be thou an example to the believers in conversation.

If ever young ministers, or those who have views to the sacred work, expect to preserve their reputation, and keep themselves from being despised, they must with care attend to this part of the apostle's advice. Their conversation or deportment and behaviour in the world should be grave and serious, becoming the gospel of Christ, and worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called, both as Christians and Ministers. He that is desirous of avoiding contempt will consider, with attention and care, what will suit and comport best with his ministerial character, what is most likely to recommend and adorn, dignify and establish the honor of it, and he will moreover be careful to pursue those things that are true, that are ho-

ness, that are just, that are pure, that are lovely and of good report; shunning with care and watchfulness every appearance of evil. And he that is thus an example to the believers, will never be despised by any man whose regard is worthy his notice.

3dly. Be thou an example to the believers in charity.

If ever young ministers, and those who have views to the ministry, expect to preserve the dignity of their office and their influence, they must carefully study to be examples to the believers in true and fervent love to God and men. Love is the fulfilling of the law, and the best spring of ministerial service. In this employment in particular, our Lord called for Peter's love, *John* xxi. 16. Simon son of Jonas *lovest thou me?* And as a test of it said to him, feed my lambs. And this is spoken of, as the more excellent way, more so by far than the most extraordinary gifts; *1 Cor.* xii. 31. Covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way. You see we are allowed, nay exhorted and encouraged, to covet earnestly, and to pursue unweariedly, the best gifts for public service and edification; yet, says the apostle, I will shew unto you a more excellent way; which is charity. This is so essential to the character, not only of the Christian, but also of the Minister, that all other attainments gifts and abilities, are nothing without it, *1 Cor.* 13. And this charity should be extended to, and exercised towards men, without limitation, without respect to names or parties. We ought to honor all men, to love the brotherhood, the children of God, though they may

may not be of our mind in every thing. That is a most admirable gradation, which the apostle Peter has left on record for our direction. 2 Peter i. 7. Add to brotherly kindness, charity. Brotherly kindness is a virtue we should exercise towards those who stand in the nearest relation to us, with whom we have immediate communion, with whom we have the most entire agreement in sentiment and practice; nor are we to stop here, but must to this add charity to persons of every denomination, of every station and condition, love to all men, yea to our enemies. And as we have opportunity we are called upon to do good unto all, Gal. vi. 10. But it may be proper to observe, that we should distinguish between men and their mistakes; we are to love the men whilst, with the utmost care we guard against their errors; we should hate every false way, though it may be chosen by the dearest friend we have upon earth. God has made it our duty to try the spirits. 1 John iv. 1. And if they are not of God, we are not to pay any regard to them. And we ought ever to remember, that, agreeable to the exhortation, Jude iii. we are to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. With great care should we also distinguish between men and their crimes; and when called upon by a faithful discharge of our duty to reprove and rebuke with warmth and severity; yet, in order to preserve the honor and respect due to the ministry, it is needful in this painful service to make it appear, that it is done out of love to their souls, and with a view to their good.

4. Be thou an example to the believers in spirit, that is, in temper and disposition.

And this is highly necessary, in order to preserve the young minister, and those who have views to the ministry, from contempt, to maintain the dignity, and support the reputation of the ministerial character. In spirit being open and generous, free and familiar, affectionate and humble, peaceable and holy, meek and patient, forbearing and forgiving, lively and active, steady and uniform, in the service of God, for his honor, and for the conversion and edification of precious immortal souls. Such a spirit as this is an excellent spirit; and he who lives in the exercise of such a temper is a lovely example to the believers: nor is there a man of good sense or real grace, but will both love and honor him.

5. Be thou an example to the believers in faith.

He that would preserve his honor as a minister, and keep himself from being despised, must act as one who with the heart believes, and loves that form of doctrine that has been delivered unto him in the holy scriptures, as one whose care is to cleave to it, and hold it fast, agreeable to the advice which *Paul* gave to *Timothy*. 2 Tim. i. 13. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.

And he should also be an example in the exercise of the grace of faith, be concerned that his faith, as a grace may grow, that it be strong and steadfast, lively, active, and vigorous, in all his conflicts with his spiritual enemies; that he may triumph in Christ; that
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his faith may operate to the purifying of his heart and obtaining a victory over the world, despising both the smiles and the frowns of it, when they appear as temptations to either to allure his affections, or excite his fears, to drive him away from God, his truths or service. And to these he should be concerned to add his example in all the duties of faith towards God, holding fast the profession of it without wavering steadfast unto the end, Heb. x. 23 ; and in all the duties of faithfulness towards men so as to fulfil all his obligations and engagements to them; especially in a faithful discharge of the various duties of his ministerial office towards all with whom he is connected, without partiality, without hypocrisy. For it is indispensibly required of these stewards in the mysteries of God, 1 Cor. iv. 2, that they be found faithful. And. 2 Cor. iv. 2, that they renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully ; but by manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And he that is thus an example to the believers, need not fear that he will ever sink into contempt, whilst there are those upon earth who are friends to truth and holiness.

6. Be thou an example to the believers in purity.

If young ministers, and those who have views to the work of the ministry, wish and desire to secure and establish their honor, influence and usefulness; if they wish to be preserved from contempt and disgrace, they must be examples to the believers in purity. And in order to attain this important end, they must make

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it their constant concern to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, to abstain, and stand at the remotest distance, from all moral impurity, from all the lusts of the flesh, and the secret, and to men unknown, corruptions of the heart; they must be concerned to live, as well as preach the purity of the gospel. A minister that has no regard to purity and holiness, and who is not himself an example to the believers herein, is the reproach of his profession, a dishonor and grief to the church of God, a stumbling block to the enquirer, and the means of hardening the infidel. Such a minister will unavoidably, and deservedly sink into contempt; and no man who is not as bad as *himself* but must and will despise him.

Thirdly, I now come to advance some arguments to inforce upon those, who have views to the work of the ministry, a due regard to the advice of the apostle; which may serve as an application of the whole. And

First, Besides what has been said, that this is the way to preserve them from contempt and disgrace, I would add, in order to engage such to aspire after this amiable character to be examples to believers, consider seriously, *that the praise and glory of your dear Lord and Master demands it of you.* That the name of God and his Son be not blasphemed, you should call to mind, Math. v. 14, &c. that ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid, neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel; but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your
Father

Father which is in heaven. Your views to the ministry, and your entrance upon that office, imply that you know the will of God, that you approve the things that are excellent, that you ought to be a guide of the blind, a light to them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish. You therefore which design to teach others should also teach yourselves, and be an example to the believers, or else, through breaking the law, you will dishonor God, and his name will be blasphemed through you.

Secondly, Ministers should be examples to the believers, because *their own honor and usefulness require it of them*: that so their doctrine and conduct may correspond; that the pulpit and the life may harmonize, and the preaching and practice answer each other; that so they may commend themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God, by renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty, and giving no offence in any thing that the ministry be not blamed.

When the sons of Eli become sons of Belial, and know not the Lord, their sin is very great before the Lord: for men will be under a temptation to abhor the offering of the Lord, yea and the offerers also will be deservedly exposed to contempt, Mal. ii. 8, 9. But ye have departed out of the way, ye have caused many to stumble at the law, ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts, ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law, therefore have I made you contemptible and base before the people.

The profit and edification of those you may be

called to preach to, depends upon, and is highly concerned in your being an example to them. When the design of the ministry is exemplified in the conduct of those who preach, it is more likely to be a favour of life unto life; and the exhortations of him, whose life preaches, will have a peculiar cogency and force. For he may then say brethren be ye followers of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example, Phil. iii. 17. And finally brethren, those things which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

Thirdly, If you would *be the joy and honor of those churches which first gave encouragement to you in your views to the ministry*, tried your gifts, approved them, and called you to preach the gospel, be examples to the believers in all your future conduct and ministry. You will, in doing this, reflect an honor upon them, give them the greatest pleasure, and they will have cause to glorify God on your behalf. But if it should be otherwise! (which God forbid) what reproach to yourselves! and what grief to those who are so affectionately concerned for your reputation and usefulness!

Fourthly, If you wish *to be the honor and joy of your tutors*, be examples to the believers in your future conduct and conversation. You are witnesses of the tender and feeling concern they have for you, in their fervent applications to God on your behalf, in the important and affectionate instructions they give you, and in their warmest wishes for your growing holiness and future usefulness.

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Your diligence and application, your improvement and progress in useful learning, while under their immediate care, will give them pleasure and reflect an honor upon them ; but nothing will give them so much satisfaction, as to hear that you are examples to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Fifthly, Are you desirous so to act as to give pleasure and joy to those who have so nobly and generously contributed to furnish out the necessary means for your improvement in literature, and to support you while you are in the pursuit of it ? Be you then examples to the believers ; cultivate in yourselves, and promote in others, the spirit of the gospel : without this, whatever improvements you may make in learning, or what right soever you may have to the reputation of being scholars, yet, without this remember you can have no right to be called the disciples of Jesus or faithful ministers of the gospel of Christ. And with sorrow, will your generous friends reflect, that their chief end has not been answered respecting you.

Sixthly, Are you willing, and solicitous, to support the honor and credit of this well designed institution, to remove the prejudices, and effectually answer the objections of those, who neither see its usefulness, nor wish its prosperity ? Be you examples then to the believers ; set out with this in your view ; and wherever your future lives and labours may be disposed of by the all-wise providence of God, let this be ever attended to by you. And in so doing you will give full

proof, that you are really converted by the grace of God, that you have a spiritual knowledge of what is contained in the scriptures of truth, that you have had a dispensation from God to preach the gospel of his grace, and to make known to men the unsearchable riches of Christ ; making it appear, that you are apt to teach, having love to your work and delight in it ; while the call of the church and its approbation, give you reason to hope this is the sphere, in which the great head of it designed you to move. And in being thus an example to the believers, you will show at once, that your views are right, and your conversation becoming the gospel of Christ. And thus having what is confessed and acknowledged, on all hands, to be the essential qualifications of a gospel minister, it must appear not a little absurd and unreasonable for any to object to your fitness for that work and office, merely because you have had an opportunity to improve your talents for public usefulness, by enjoying the benefit of this institution.

Seventhly. If you desire, or wish to give joy and pleasure to your fellow-laborers in the work of the ministry, be you examples to the believers. They are ready to say to you, as Paul to Philemon, Brethren, let us have joy of you in the Lord ; refresh our bowels in the Lord. And like John, as he wrote to his well-beloved Gaius, They will rejoice greatly if the brethren can, and do testify of the truth that is in you, and that you walk in the truth. For they can have no greater joy than to hear that you thus walk. But the

the contrary will be to them matter of inconceivable sorrow and grief.

Eighthly. To add no more. The comfort and safety of your own souls stand connected with your being examples to the believers. If your disposition and conduct should (which God forbid!) be the reverse of what has been recommended, how uncomfortable must be your course, and how dreadful the end of it! *Matt. xxiv. 48,* But if that wicked servant shall say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him in sunder, and shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. To which I may add what is said, *Matt. vii. 22, 23.* Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me ye that work iniquity. But I can truly say with the apostle (*Heb. vi. 9.*) That I am persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak. And if you are thus enabled to take heed to your ministry, and thus to be an example to the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity,

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the inward peace and comfort of your own minds must be great, it will be an evidence of the change of your hearts, of the safety of your state, and you will then assuredly share the blessedness of that servant, whom his Lord shall find so doing, and shall undoubtedly enter into his everlasting joy.

F I N I S.

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